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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [LI](#) [GH](#)  
SUBJECT: Liberian Refugee Update and Analysis

Ref: A. Accra 380, B. Accra 383, C. Monrovia 219, D. Accra 422 E.  
Email Koutsis-Mestetsky Mar 24, 2008

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On April 1 Minister of Interior Kwamena Bartels announced that Ghana would deport all 26,967 Liberian refugees in coordination with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and that in the interim they will be dispersed to various locations to mitigate their threat to national security. Bartels remarks followed a March 22 raid at Buduburam that led to the deportation of 16 Liberians, including 13 registered refugees. This action was taken without consultation with UNHCR and appears to conflict with agreements made with the government of Liberia to delay deportations until after meetings on March 26. As of March 27, UNHCR told Post they had not discussed the deportations with the Ghanaian government, nor were they apprised of decisions reached during high level discussions between Ghana and Liberia. On March 29, the governments of Liberia and Ghana issued a joint communique on the formation of a tripartite commission with UNHCR on plans for the return of all Liberian refugees from Ghana. While plans to remove the Liberians from Ghana appear to be politically popular in this election year, the GOG's actions seem to signal a deterioration of the asylum regime in Ghana, a development that has also been enabled by UNHCR Accra's unassertive stance toward the GOG. End Summary.

GOG announces Intent to Repatriate All Liberians  
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¶2. (SBU) On April 1 Minister of Interior Bartels told a press conference that Ghana would repatriate all 26,967 Liberian refugees in coordination with UNHCR [N.B. In addition to the 26,967 registered Liberian refugees, there are an estimated 15,000 unregistered Liberians living in Ghana, for a total of approximately 40,000.]

¶3. (SBU) Bartels also announced that Buduburam would be closed "to prevent the breeding of new sets of refugees into the country" and said that all Liberian refugees will be dispersed to various locations to mitigate their threat to national security. Bartels said protestors had prevented children from attending school and prevented food distribution. He also said the government was aware of "a number of ex-combatants in the Buduburam settlement and would not sit down unconcerned for the security of the country to be jeopardized."

¶4. (SBU) The time frame for returns has not been established. Some reports indicate that the GOG intends to complete returns within six months, and that repatriation may begin between April 4 and April 30.

Deportations  
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¶5. (SBU) Bartels remarks followed protests at Buduburam and the

arrest of some 630 protestors on March 17. After contradictory statements regarding the number of Liberians the GOG planned to deport (refs B and D), and an apparent agreement with the Liberian government to delay deportations until after high-level bilateral discussions on March 26 (ref D), the GOG deported 16 individuals (14 men and 2 women) on March 22 via Ghanaian military aircraft, thirteen of whom were registered as refugees. Per Embassy Monrovia, the GOL brought the sixteen to a high school inside the Firestone rubber plantation for processing

#### Arrests

¶16. (SBU) The 16 deportees were from among a group arrested on March 22 when police conducted a raid at Buduburam, arresting two busloads of individuals, mostly men. Bartels announced that 107 Liberians were arrested March 22, 77 of whom were released after screening. He said that the 16 were deported on "account of activities which had security implications for the country." 12 others were released on bail and are under investigation, and 2 were held for immigration offences. According to an NGO volunteer who witnessed the arrests, it was not clear whether the individuals arrested were the "trouble-makers" the police sought to arrest. According to UNHCR Accra Representative Aida Mariam, the GOG did not provide UNHCR with information about or access to the arrested individuals prior to the deportation.

¶17. (SBU) A Ghanaian NGO, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), filed a lawsuit challenging the government's arrest and detention of the 630 Liberians. While that lawsuit was withdrawn due to the group's release, CHRI told POL Chief April 3 that it still has a pending habeas corpus claim against the GOG for holding 23 Liberians in excess of the 48 hour statutory maximum, and is seeking a court order barring the GOG from deporting the 23. Post will

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report additional details on this legal challenge as appropriate.

#### Liberia-Ghana Consultations

¶18. (SBU) On March 27, Refugee Coordinator met with Mariam to discuss the outcomes of the high-delegation meetings between the government of Liberia and Ghana, the deportations of the 13 refugees on March 22, plans for the approximately 600 individuals in detention outside Accra, the registered and unregistered Liberians. Mariam said she did not know if any decisions had been reached, and anticipated that the governments would release a joint communiqué. Mariam noted that she had not held any separate discussions with the GoG since the March 22 deportations. She said she did not plan to raise the issue of the arrests or refoulements, and that UNHCR's priority was returning normalcy, security and services to Buduburam settlement.

¶19. (SBU) With the end of the protests and the return of relative calm, Mariam said that UNHCR intended to resume operations, without adjusting its work program. It plans to immediately resume arrangements to voluntary repatriate 400 Liberians who had already registered. Mariam said she did not know if UNHCR will continue to register Liberians for voluntary repatriation, or if this will be limited to the 400 already registered. UNHCR Liberia would provide integration assistance to returning refugees, but not to the non-refugee deportees.

¶110. (SBU) UNHCR said that it also intends to continue with self-reliance programs in furtherance of local integration, despite public statements by President Kufuor announcing the GOG's intention to repatriate all 40,000 Liberians, and a lack of significant interest in local integration among the Liberians.

¶111. (SBU) On March 28, the Ghanaian and Liberian governments released a joint communiqué which included the following:

a. Formation of a Tripartite Committee including representatives of the Liberian and Ghanaian governments and UNHCR "to oversee the implementation of decisions reached on the repatriation of Liberian

refugees in Ghana."

b. "The Government of Ghana invoked the Cessation Clause and initiated discussions with the UNHCR on the modalities for the eventual repatriation of the refugees in Ghana."

c. "Those refugees who have registered to return voluntarily under UNHCR program would be encouraged to do so."

d. "In the meantime, refugees at the Buduburam Settlement will be dispersed for better management and monitoring in consonance with the mandate of the Tripartite Committee."

e. "The refugees at the Kodiabe camp would be returned to the Buduburam Settlement." [NB: the refugees have been returned.]

¶12. (SBU) UNHCR Representative Mariam told Refugee Coordinator March 27 that she had sent the communiqu  to UNHCR HQ in Geneva but did not provide further comment. Refugee Coordinator will report any additional clarifications as they are received.

Comment

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¶13. (SBU) It appears that UNHCR-GOG consultations thus far have not been as thorough as desired, and UNHCR must re-establish its leadership role on this issue and actively ensure that the GOG is applying appropriate legal protections to maintain the integrity of the asylum system.

Ghana's deportation of 16 individuals was conducted without following appropriate legal processes or adequate cooperation with UNHCR. While the GOG has announced a Tripartite Commission to oversee the process of returns, it is not yet clear if it will establish an appeals procedure for those who claim continued fear, pursuant to the standard under international law. From the GOG's public statements, focused on the need to maintain public order and security, it appears intent on returning the Liberians. The issue is not likely to have a wider impact on Ghana-Liberian relations. Ghanaians had taken pride in being the only African country to welcome the Bulk Challenge ship in 1996. However, the experience of hosting Liberians may prevent them from welcoming any new groups and may adversely affect future asylum adjudications. End Comment.

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